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1. PRE-ELECTION TENSIONS IN NICARAGUA AND EL SALVADOR

Violence has already marred the campaign for the 5 February elections in Nicaragua. Disquiet may also be expected in El Salvador until the 5 March elections there are over.

Nicaragua's uneasy political calm was broken on 22 January following a large opposition rally in Managua. Several are dead and scores wounded as a result of shooting which began after national guardsmen tried to disperse milling mobs with fire hoses. What effect this outbreak will have on the elections is not known at this time.

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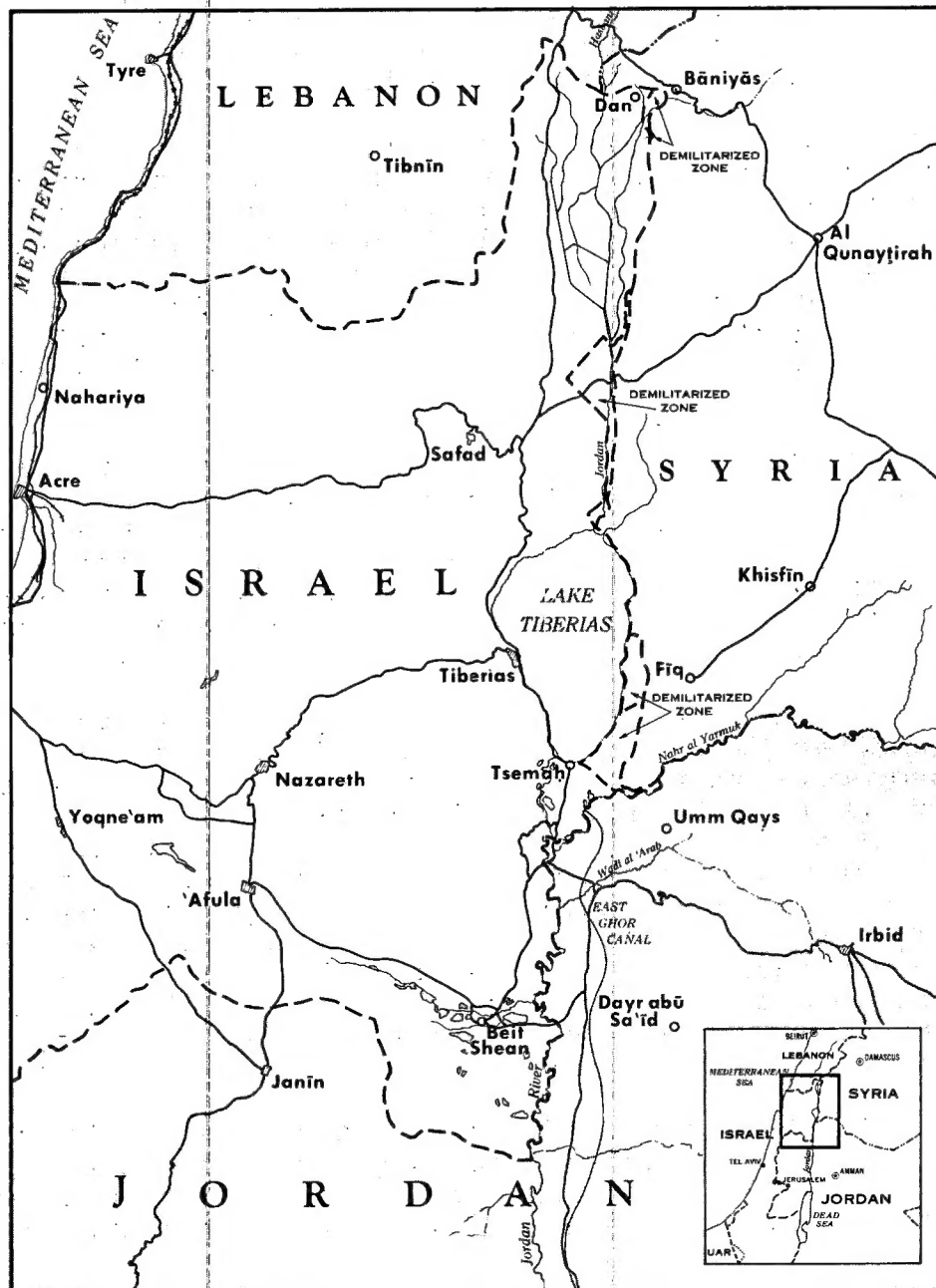
El Salvador, on the other hand, has had free elections since the present government came to power in 1961 and hopes to maintain this record. Many Salvadorans are apprehensive, however, realizing that democratic procedures are not deep rooted and that there are still those who see force as the only means of change. Only last week tension increased when plans for a right-wing military coup became known.

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2. ISRAEL-SYRIA

The forthcoming meeting of Israel and Syria on their border dispute offers some slight hope for a reduction of tension, but the session will not touch on the critical issue of Syrian-supported sabotage missions into Israel.

Although Israeli Prime Minister Eshkol says his government has refrained from immediate retaliation for these continuing forays because it wants to exhaust political and diplomatic resources in an effort to maintain peace, it was Israel which insisted that it would only discuss cultivation in the demilitarized zone (see map) at the upcoming meeting, which probably will convene on 25 January.

Israel is trying to avoid a debate on the more basic issue of its disputed claim to sovereignty over the zone. The impasse over that claim--which is not recognized by either the UN or the US--has virtually paralyzed the UN armistice commission since 1951 and has been "the main origin and cause of tension and incidents" along the border, according to a UN report of early January.

Despite warnings last week by Israeli Foreign Minister Eban that the meeting, if it were to succeed, could not take place against a background of "shots and explosions," an Israeli Army announcement on 20 January stated that another mine had been discovered near the border on a road which had been swept by a mine detection patrol only the previous day. An official organ of the ruling Baath Party in Damascus had earlier stated that Syrians could not be compelled to "act as guards for the Israel border" by preventing strikes by Palestinian infiltrators.

In the absence of any sign that the sabotage incidents will cease, the danger of Israeli retaliation against Syria will remain acute, particularly should these cause additional Israeli fatalities.

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3. THAILAND

The Thai Communist Party (TCP) has evidently been playing an active role in organizing and directing the subversive movement in northeast Thailand.

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There is some indication that the TCP may be moving toward a closer public association with the various Thai subversive fronts. The clandestine Voice of the Thai People radio carried a TCP communiqué for the first time on 7 January. The party made specific reference to the Peking-based Thai Patriotic Front, although it did not indicate an association with it.

Communist activity in the northeast has been highlighted in recent weeks by attacks on isolated bridges and roads, in what appears to be a new effort to restrict the mobility of government troops. At least two small-scale ambushes and numerous skirmishes have also been reported, but the majority of these were the result of government initiatives. The bulk of the Communist terrorist activity continues to be assassinations, forced propaganda meetings, and minor harassments of government outposts.

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4. CAMBODIA

The government of Prime Minister Lon Nol is taking an increasingly active role in the day-to-day conduct of Cambodian affairs.

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The government's desire to assume greater responsibility in part reflects the personalities and broad experience of Lon Nol and the cabinet. It may also be symptomatic of a general reluctance on the part of the Phnom Penh elite to be bound by Sihanouk's leftist policies, with which they have long been unsympathetic, and to pay unquestioning obedience to some of the excesses of Sihanouk's autocratic rule.

Sihanouk is now in France on an oft-postponed rest cure. His abrupt departure on 6 January has prompted rumors in Phnom Penh that he may have left under duress, but these appear to be without foundation. Before his departure, Sihanouk indicated a shuffle in cabinet posts might occur following his return, although he has stated that the Lon Nol government would continue on until at least the end of 1967.

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